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ABSTRACT

Some of the denial and fear that accompanies homosexuality and the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) can be dealt with by discussing the following three issues: the AIDS epidemic, the problems of gay and lesbian community college students, and finally, the teaching of literature--especially poetry. Exploring both poetry and the AIDS epidemic can make all students more aware, more human, and more sensitive. Community college teachers have the opportunity to be on the forefront of an educational campaign to inform people about both AIDS and poetry. Rather than using literature specifically about AIDS, such as Larry Kramer's play, "The Normal Heart," or novels that speak about living and dying with AIDS, it is possible to use more traditional and timeless literature as examples, such as the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, Walt Whitman, D.H. Lawrence and others. Elizabeth Bishop's poetry, for example, is capable of bringing a new perspective to these issues. It can help accomplish the objectives of teaching something directly about the human condition and indirectly about AIDS and the lives of gay and lesbian students. (Three tables of data, one poem, one page of survey results, and 16 references are appended.) (RAE)

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Safe Sex and Dangerous Poems: AIDS, Literature and the Gay and Lesbian Community College Student

by

Robert Klein Engler[1]

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Introduction

A sensitive gay or lesbian social observer, looking over the decade of the eighties, might decide that America is a land of denial and fear. America denies the reality of the gay and lesbian experience and is afraid of the big disease with the little name. Sooner or later, this denial and fear also makes its way into the classroom. It is there that some of us may choose to talk about safe sex and dangerous poems.

In this essay I want to discuss how we can deal with some of the denial and fear that accompanies homosexuality and AIDS. To do this I will initiate a discussion of three issues: the AIDS epidemic, the problems of gay and lesbian community college students, and finally, the teaching of literature -- especially poetry. At first some may ask how these issues are related. I hope to show that they are and will use the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop to do that. I want to explore how both poetry and the AIDS epidemic can make all our students more aware, more human, more sensitive. I want to do this because as community college teachers we may have the opportunity to be on the forefront of an educational campaign to inform people about both AIDS and poetry.

Admittedly, there is a difference of opinion about my concerns. The relationship between AIDS and types or frequency of sexual activity, for example is much debated. Since all the facts are not in on this matter, it seems prudent to take a conservative position. After all, we are dealing with people's lives and sometimes, in love, their unalterable affections. Where harm to life or affections is possible, it is kind to be conservative. That is why I want to emphasize love over promiscuity, literature over advertising. Failing an emphasis on love and literature, we are the ones, as practical teachers, that might have to introduce students to knowledge about safe sex and dangerous poems.[2]

Sometimes it's better to approach a subject indirectly. Rather than use literature specifically about AIDS, such as Larry Kramer's play, *The Normal Heart*, or novels that speak about living and dying with AIDS, I want to use more traditional literature as examples. In my case, I wish to use more recognized and timeless work, specifically, the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop. My discussion begins with a consideration of AIDS among minorities, goes on to treat gay and lesbian college students as an overlooked minority group, then presents the results of a short survey conducted on these issues. It ends with a consideration of three poems by Elizabeth Bishop. I hope to show that her poetry is capable of giving us a new perspective on the previous points. It can help us accomplish the objectives of teaching something directly about the human condition and indirectly about AIDS and the lives of our gay and lesbian students.

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[2] Free information and safe sex materials are distributed by The Reimer Foundation, 606 W. Barry, Box 300, Chicago, IL 60657, (312) 935 - SAFE.

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AIDS and Minorities

All the data show that AIDS cases are rising among heterosexuals and minorities.[3] It is also true that intravenous drug users are at a risk for AIDS and help spread the virus to a wider population. If you teach at a community college that has a high minority enrollment you will sooner or later have to confront the problem of AIDS along with other problems we face every day, like low reading scores, lack of preparation and remedial education. If you teach in a community college sooner or later you will have to deal with the problems of gay and lesbian students in the era of AIDS. When we start to do this, we sometimes discover the striking truth that often the people who need information about AIDS and safe sex the most are the ones most likely not to get it.

These people could also be the ones who need the truths poetry offers as well. Didn't William Carlos William complain that it is hard to get the news from poetry, but that men die daily for lack of what poetry has to offer? AIDS forces us to see relationships and sexuality from a new perspective. Poetry can also force us to examine our values. Just as a "dangerous poem" is a poem that shows us something we haven't seen before, makes us literally "reflect," that is, "bend back," so we can look again, creating an opportunity for a change of heart or mind, so too, the facts about AIDS and sexual activity, the facts about the lives of our gay and lesbian students, can alter some prejudices -- perhaps change some minds. Safe sex and dangerous poems might be the prescription for surviving the next decade.

Gay and Lesbian Students as a Minority Group

Most students we see in the community college are from minority groups. Our gay and lesbian students are members of a minority group as well. Some of them may even be a minority within a minority.

As a rule of thumb, you should figure that about ten percent of any group you encounter will be gay or lesbian. The social and psychological sciences have not yet been able to answer the question why people are this way, but ten percent usually are. We also do not know why some people become

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The Kupona Network, through their AIDS outreach program called "IMANI," provides HIV counseling, AIDS education and information, support services and has a Drop-In Center all based and operated in Chicago's black community. (In Swahili, the word "IMANI" means confidence.) A recorded message in Spanish is available about AIDS (El SIDA) by calling (312) 927-1534. The Pilsen-Little Village Mental Health Center is also willing to work with Hispanics who have questions or need help with AIDS or AIDS related difficulties. Their address is: 2635 West 23rd St. Chicago, 60608. Spanish speaking students may want to contact the Mexican organization *Groupo ¡Y Que!*, Apartado Postal #904, Oficina Central, Tijuana, B.C., Mexico, Tel: 80-99-63. In Chicago, The Howard Brown Memorial Clinic serves the gay and lesbian community and has information in English and Spanish. They may be reached by calling (312) 871-5777. For general information and assistance nation wide, 24 hours a day, one may call 1-800-342-AIDS.

[3] Data for rates of AIDS infections in blacks and Hispanics on the local and the national level are interesting to examine. Blacks make up about 13 percent of the total US population, while Hispanics make up about 6 percent. In some areas, like large cities and the Southwest, these percentages are locally higher. In Chicago, for example, blacks make up about 40 percent of the population and Hispanics about 15 percent. All things being equal, we would expect these percentages to be reflected in rates of AIDS cases as well. What we do find, however, on the national level, is the startling fact that cases of AIDS among these minority populations are almost twice as high as their national population percentages. Recent figures for Chicago show that rates of infection are almost equal to percentages in the city population. In Chicago for the months of June and July 1988, total AIDS cases, according to the AIDS Office of the Department of Health, break down into the following categories: June - Total =76, Black = 27, Hispanic = 11, White = 36, Other = 1; July - Total = 84, Black = 21, Hispanic = 15, White = 47, Other = 1. In June 35 percent of the AIDS cases were black and in July the percentage was 25 percent. We must take care not to interpret these data in a racial sense. We do not treat a disease by inflicting blame, racial or otherwise. Just because most people who break their legs sking are white does not mean that broken legs are racially caused. The sad conclusion is that blacks and Hispanics are not discriminated against when it comes to AIDS. We also have to be careful so that we do not fall into the trap of thinking AIDS is only a disease that effects homosexuals. Just as Legionnaires' disease effects more than members of the American Legion, AIDS can happen to anyone. World wide, AIDS strikes more heterosexuals than homosexuals. This is especially the case in Africa. In the United States, AIDS happens to have gained a foothold in the gay community, and my paper attempts to reflect that circumstance. As of August 15th, 1988, there were 70,702 cases of AIDS reported nationally. So far more than half of them have died. New York City leads the nation, among cities, with 15,654 cases of AIDS reported there.

heterosexual. We do know that sexual orientation is not a matter of conscious choice. People do not consciously choose to be gay or straight. The fact is that about ten per cent of any random population will be homosexual. I accept this as a constant throughout history and cultures. So, if you teach at a campus with three thousand students, about three hundred will be gay or lesbian. In just a class of 30, you are likely to find about three. There are about 200 people at this conference, for example, so there are also about 20 gays and lesbians in attendance.

Another way of looking at these figures is to realize that in every class you teach, you may have three students who could belong to a high risk group for getting AIDS. Don't we have a duty to these, as well as to all our students, to inform them about prevention? If we can use poetry to initiate this discussion, shouldn't we use it? Since more likely than not, our gay and lesbian students are either still in the closet or wish to remain invisible among the general student population, we have to talk to them without giving their secret away. Poetry, as T.S. Eliot suggested, is a good way to do that. By not singling them out, we also protect them from some prejudice and discrimination.

Like all minorities, gays and lesbians still suffer from discrimination and prejudice. Most of us recognize this when we see discrimination against an adult or a faculty member, but we really don't think about it when it comes to our students. Nevertheless, it is when we are young that discrimination and prejudice can be most damaging. What is ironic about discrimination and prejudice against gay and lesbian students is that they may be the most unrecognized and at the same time the most discriminated against minority group on our campuses. One of my students in sociology was more than outspoken about his hatred for gays. After our discussion on AIDS, he wrote the following in his daily journal:

> **I think this is sick. I think we should place an ad to seek homos -- say: "Young, attractive gay man, straight in public, for pleasure." I bet you'll get lots of inquiries. So you get the names and addresses of all those fags out there and you kill them or do things to make them think twice about being a homo.**

This kind of attitude has forced many gay and lesbian students to either deny their sexual identity or organize for change and protection. Unfortunately, student organizations for gays and lesbians do not often exist at the community college level. Nevertheless, writing in the magazine, *The Nation*, Mark Gevisser notes this about some gay and lesbian college students:

> **...the combination of AIDS and a conservative decade has presented new challenges for lesbian and gay students. In this environment of increased homophobia, many of them feel that the acceptance they are fighting so hard to gain is being threatened....AIDS has forced many students to recognize the absolute necessity of coming out -- in terms of support, education and, of course, political power.**

Many feel that discrimination and anti-gay violence have actually increased on some campuses because of AIDS. In his article, "Homophobia and AIDS," in *Campus Voice*, Tony Vellela agrees. He writes, "Nothing in recent years has done more to harm and help the status of lesbians and gay men in America than AIDS." This situation of both help and harm, like any situation of contraries, can produce tension and stress in our lives.[4]

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[4] As older students enroll in the community colleges, we may find examples of discrimination and prejudice diminishing. Night students, working students and those who are married or upwardly mobile may be less threatened by gays and lesbians than 18 or 19 year olds. There is even some data to suggest that upwardly mobile students, especially males, are more likely to be gay. They are the ones, for example, who leave small towns for the freedom and opportunity city life offers. They also seek out educational opportunities at community colleges. Cf. "Working with Gay and Lesbian Clients," and "Working with Gay and Lesbian Youth," *Practice Digest*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Summer 1984.

It is this tension on campus, the tension between AIDS helping and harming gay and lesbian students, along with discrimination and the conflict over being closeted or coming out, that many gay and lesbian college students live with. There is a case where a student with AIDS was discriminated against at a medical school. If this is so at a medical school, what is it like for others at more traditional schools? In the community colleges, where our students may be from more conservative, working-class backgrounds, or from ethnic groups that have stereotypical values about homosexuality, the tension can be even greater. Imagine what kinds of tensions would exist on your campus if it was generally known one of the students had AIDS.

The City Colleges of Chicago does have an AIDS policy. So far as I know only one death from AIDS has occurred among the staff. At the very least, an increased awareness of AIDS ought to make faculty members inquire into the position their campus would take when confronted with a student, staff or faculty member with the disease. Would there be fear and discrimination, harassment and prejudice? In her *Campus Voice* article, "Hostile Eyes," Peggy Bendel writes:

> **As a lecturer at Yale University, Dr.Gregory M. Hereck conducted a survey of 200 lesbian and gay students -- nearly 50 percent -- reported that they'd experienced some kind of anti-gay harassment....Noting that lesbian and gay men will always be a minority group...Hereck says that "there is a high correlation between homophobia and a reluctance to accept other minority groups."**

The fact is, some of our gay and lesbian students may need an awareness of both safe sex and dangerous poems not only to get through life but to get through college. Our straight students also need to learn about the special problems of gay and lesbian students, along with facts about AIDS. How do we bring them to this awareness, how do we move our students to a consideration of tolerance and literature? Let me tell you right now, I'm not sure. All I know is that we have to try, we have to begin a discussion of these topics so that we can be prepared for the worst.

Opinions and Experience -- The Survey

How many of us actually discuss the problems of AIDS in our classrooms?[5] How many of us use books by gay and lesbian authors? Do we know anything about the lives of our gay and lesbian students? I want to start our discussion with the results of a survey I conducted of the people who attended our last conference.

In a paper like this, constrained by length, I can only deal with part of the questionnaire. This part shows that sixty-two percent of the respondants used a book by a gay or lesbian author in their classes. One respondant even went so far as to write, "How can you teach a course in English literature and not use a gay or lesbain author!" In the same vein, sixty-two percent of the respondants discussed AIDS in their classes. (Tables One and Two, p. 9) Does using a book by a gay or lesbian author make a difference when it comes to talking about AIDS? The survey suggests that it does make a difference. Sixty-one percent of those who used a book by a gay or lesbian author also discussed AIDS in their classes, while fifty-five percent of those who did not use such a book, initiated a discussion about AIDS. (Table Three, p. 9) Admittedly, these are not earthshaking conclusions. Yet in their own way they indicate a trend. That trend in itself is encouraging. We are talking about AIDS with our students. Since prevention is our best defense against this disease, a discussion of it can help further awareness and ultimately, prevention. But what about the other forty-eight percent, those who claim not to use a text by a gay or lesbian author and not to discuss AIDS?

It seems odd and disappointing, when it is clearly demonstrated that many of the classics in English literature, or at the very least books and poems that have a unique value, were written by gay and lesbian authors, that many claim not to use such books in their teaching. Does no one use Marlowe, Bishop, Cather, Crane, Auden and Merrill any more? If not, what are students reading? I suspect that

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[5] This survey is based upon a random sample of those who attended the 1986 CCC conferences on literature across the disciplines. Two hundred questionnaires were sent through the mail and twenty-nine were completed and returned.

in every class you teach in literature there is a representative piece by a gay or lesbian author and the sad truth is that reference to their sexuality is disguised or considered unimportant. But should this be the case in the era of AIDS? I suggest that we be up front about an author's sexual orientation to assist our students in developing positive attitudes about the contributions of gay and lesbian people to literature and the arts in particular, and our society in general.

By recognizing that a homosexual orientation can contribute to a literary imagination, we can initiate a discussion of sexuality and AIDS. We can inform our gay and straight students about prevention and risk taking. Remember, there may be at least three students in your class you ought to reach with information about AIDS prevention and many more that need a general understanding about the role of sexual activity in advancing certain diseases.

Finally, let me mention in passing that most faculty members were not aware of any gay or lesbian organization on their community college campuses. Only fifteen percent claimed they knew of such a group, while seventy percent said they had an admitted gay or lesbian student in a class they taught. This is not remarkable, for, unlike four year colleges, community colleges seem especially poor in student life outside the classroom. It would be interesting to know to what degree this contributes to a feeling of isolation and loneliness among gay and lesbian students at a community college. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that just because there are no formal organizations on a campus, it does not mean informal groups do no exist. Perhaps a sympathetic faculty member may become aware of these informal groups and advance the cause of AIDS education through them.

Literature and Identity

There are many reasons besides AIDS education that make it important to use literature by recognized gay and lesbian writers in the classroom.[6] We read black and female authors to see how their life experiences influence their work. We read these authors to learn about the special circumstances of their lives as minority Americans. The same must be done for gay and lesbian authors.

Many social scientists agree that positive role models are an important element in developing a positive self concept. Like most young people, our gay and lesbian students need positive role models so that they can develop a positive identity. They can get these role models by reading and knowing about the lives of gay and lesbian authors. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could honestly teach the poetry of Walt Whitman and not even mention the fact that he was homosexual? Wouldn't it be wonderful for a confused gay or lesbian student to know in a positive way that one of America's greatest poets was a homosexual?

Social scientists also recognize that social structures and elements of culture often contribute to the development of literature. Speaking as a sociologist and not a literary critic, the homosexual condition seems to be one of the preconditions for literature of twentieth century America. Let me list a few of the sociological reasons why I say this. ↖much of the

The Honor Roll: Just look at all the writers who we know are sensitive to gay or lesbian concerns: Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, James Merrill, Truman Capote, George Santayana, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Bishop, T.S. Eliot, Richard Howard, Andre Gide, Rita Mae Brown, D.H. Lawrence, W.H. Auden, Marcel Proust, Oscar Wilde, Allen Ginsberg, Thom Gunn, Federico Garcia Lorca, Christopher

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[6]The last time I had an opportunity to talk to this gathering I proposed a paper on another writer who happens to be lesbian, Willa Cather. Sharon O'Brien's recent book, *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice*, has studied the effects of Cather's lesbianism on her writing. One of those effects, in my opinion, was that she could understand gay men. Such was the insight she had when she wrote her short story, "Paul's Case."

Willa Cather's story can be interpreted as her way of documenting the tragic fate of a gay student's life when he couldn't be gay. That was Paul's case, his problem, and we will see a lot more Pauls, Tyrones, Ritas and Pedros, along with Quangs, Omars, Lees and Jeffs in the years ahead. Cather's short story "Paul's Case," is as an example of how we have to reach young men and women like her protagonist, Paul, with what the community college has to offer. This story is also as an example of what happens to many of the gay and lesbian students who come to our institutions and can't find support and help -- they too might find it necessary to commit suicide, of one kind or another. After all, in the era of AIDS, isn't it possible to say that promiscuous, unsafe sex is also a type of suicide?

Marlowe, James Baldwin, Gertrude Stein, Tennesse Williams, Robert Duncan, Edmund White, E.M. Forster, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, etc.

The Status of the Outsider: Being gay or lesbian is really a gift to those who write. I suspect, from a psychological point of view, it creates a condition of "outsider." Being gay or lesbian allows one to develop an extraordinary perspective on the ordinary, develop powers of observation, and enhances what Keats called "negative capability," without which a good writer cannot write. This theme is certainly evident in the lives of Cather and Bishop. Elizabeth Bishop no doubt acquired her status as an outsider by being a lesbian who traveled much. She knew too well the geography of exclusion.

Unrequited Love: When people cannot get what they want from the world, especially the satisfaction of a recognized and public human relationship, they often create fictitious worlds to satisfy their desire. The gay or lesbian writer often draws on the powers of unrequited love or their status as an outsider to make art in place of a relationship. This is partially the case with Elizabeth Bishop, as it is with many other good writers

Elizabeth Bishop -- A Gay Poet

The last poem Elizabeth Bishop wrote ended with the word "gay." It is short enough for me to quote here.

Sonnet

Caught -- the bubble
in the spirit-level,
a creature divided;
and the compass needle
wobbling and wavering,
undecided.
Freed -- the broken
thermometer's mercury
running away;
and the rainbow-bird
from the narrow bevel
of the empty mirror,
flying wherever
it feels like, gay!

Certainly the word "gay" retains its traditional meaning in this poem as "lighthearted, free, without a care." It also is the best word to use when we want to talk about a love that knows no bounds. In an ironic way, I am certain this is why such a word is also used to talk about those we once referred to as "homosexual."

By 1979, when this poem was written, Miss Bishop knew herself all too well. It is no surprise to me that she could finally use the word "gay" to talk about her own spirit. She is still a "creature divided," but she is also free in her imagination to go her own way. The rainbow bird that is her love will go its own way too. It will go out into the world and be gay. This is no doubt what she would allow others to do as well.

Can it not be that some day a young lesbian will read this poem in a community college English class and also have the courage to go her own way, to let her love find its own way in the world. Just the example of Miss Bishop might make this a dangerous poem for those who see conventional sexuality as a mold into which people must he hammered. It is a dangerous poem for the young because it might give them an idea of the freedom that is possible after hard work and struggle.

Sex and Poetry -- Nature and Transcendence

For many of us, the thought of AIDS strikes with all the terror and wonder of the mysterious. The natural somehow seems sister to the unnatural. The accidental link between AIDS and gays and lesbians also turns many to blaming the victim. It puts tremendous pressure on young gays or lesbians in their search for a personal and social identity. How can they be what they are when what they are means death? There is, however, a great opportunity presented in this crisis. It is the opportunity for learning and self awareness. This is always what happens when the mysterious breaks into the commonplace.

Elizabeth Bishop tried to show us this in her poetry. Her poem *The Moose* is a good example of what I mean. In this poem, the mysterious breaks into the commonplace and natural with all the wonder of a moose towering in the middle of a lonely country road. Listen to the last three stanzas of this remarkable poem:

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(We all feel) this sweet
sensation of Joy?

"Curious creatures,"
says our quiet driver,
rolling his *r*'s.
"Look at that, would you."
Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

In this elegantly constructed long poem, Miss Bishop presents a situation that is rich in detail. Reading it evokes the Nova Scotia paintings of that great American gay artist, Marsden Hartley. Moonlight, brooding skies, pines, the sea, light off the sea, salt in the air, the small talk of families, life, death -- these are all the themes that Miss Bishop touches.

It is in the every day, in the natural, that these things take on a meaning. James Merrill says that of all the modern poets, Bishop's poems are most accessibile. Yet somehow, out of this commonplace accessibility, the wondrous emerges. The image of the moose is just that. I suspect that AIDS has also emerged in our consciousness like this. Out of the natural, for sickness is profoundly natural, we also see something more, something that points to the mysterious. Sex, love and AIDS are present in our lives with a mystery that transcends the natural, just as that moose in the poem forces us out of our half sleep to remark, "Curious creature!" There is an inexplicable power in nature, sickness and sex. There is mystery still present in our failing urban, social order.

What or who then is the moose? In the final analysis it is none other than the mirror image of the lesbian poet. It is none other than Miss Bishop herself looking over the world of common men and women, their lives, their marriages, their world of home and featherbeds. She recognizes her power from the outside. She recognizes she too, like the moose, is both part of the world and also alien to it. "Curious creature," the poet, the gay or lesbian poet.

And then the world moves on, but something lingers. There is the dim smell of moose and the acrid smell of gasoline. Something lingers, the way some poems linger once we read them. The way the odor of medication lingers after we leave the hospital. So also the spirit of Miss Bishop lingers in her work. But there is also the acrid smell of gasoline, of what technology creates and destroys.

Easier to Write Than to Say

Teaching at a community college ought to make us sensitive to various ways of life, ways of life we might not condone, ways of life we might want to change. A person with AIDS also presents us with an opportunity for learning about ourselves and others. Most people initially pull away with revulsion from an AIDS patient. Look at the difficulties young Ryan White had in Indiana. But when we know the truth about the illness, we also know something more about the human condition. Certainly this is the case in Miss Bishop's poem *Filling Station*. Let's look at the first and then the last two stanzas of this poem to see how it uses the ordinary details of life to reach a larger awareness.

Oh, but it is dirty!
-- this little filling station,
oil-soaked, oil-permeated
to a disturbing, over-all
black translucency.
Be careful with that match!

Why the extraneous plant?
Why the taboret?
Why, oh why, the doily?
(Embroidered in daisy stitch
with marguerites, I think,
and heavy with gray crochet.)

Somebody embroidered the doily.
Somebody waters the plant,
or oils it, maybe. Somebody
arranges the rows of cans
so that they softly say:
ESSO -- SO -- SO --SO
to high-strung automobiles.
Somebody loves us all.

Here is a place that is singularly odd -- all dirt and grime, yet Miss Bishop can show us that there is truth and beauty to be found in ways of life different from our own. Isn't the initial reaction, "Oh, but it is dirty," very similar to our own reaction when we first heard of a person with AIDS? But look how we travel in the poem through a list of poignant details to another conclusion. In Miss Bishop's own words: "somebody loves us all."

We can also learn something of this from our black, Hispanic and other ethnic students, from our gay and lesbian students, from persons with AIDS. In turn they can learn about their condition from literature. We don't have to bring literature that is only about AIDS to the classroom to teach about the problems and complexities of this disease. The work of all great gay and lesbian poets speak to the problem of AIDS as it speaks to all the problems of the human condition.

In conclusion, I refer again to the student journals I use in class. Some students know the importance of writing. They come to understand the problems of gay and lesbian students, AIDS, and the passion and pain of everyone's life. Look at what another student wrote:

> **Writing this journal has been good. I feel this semester saw the happiest and worst experiences of my life. The happiest was my ski trip to Denver, the worst was the death of my grandfather. I still miss him. He wanted me to graduate from college, and I will. I wear his watch every day now to remind me of that promise. Thank you for the chance to write about this. Sometimes it's easier to write about things than to say them.**

Sometimes it is easier to write about love than to suffer it. And it is the strange way of love, after all, that a lot of teaching is about. What we must finally teach is that it is not sex and words, but love and poetry that make for a full and complete life. This, I believe, is a value at the core of Western civilization. I want to conclude that we are loved, that there are poems that go to the heart of the human condition, and our lives are less if we do not know this. As teachers we must help our students learn the lessons of love and poetry so that they can get past the MTV, the entertainment, the posturing and hypocrisies of soap operas, past a jumble of words and empty sex. We must let them know there is joy and power in love, we must let them see that other world, which is gay and glorious, disciplined and demanding, we must help them to have the courage to love in the face of mechanical, electronic, physical and spiritual death. This is the truth that is the point of sex and the danger of poems.

Tables One Through Three

Table One: Have you ever used a book by a gay or lesbian author in your class?

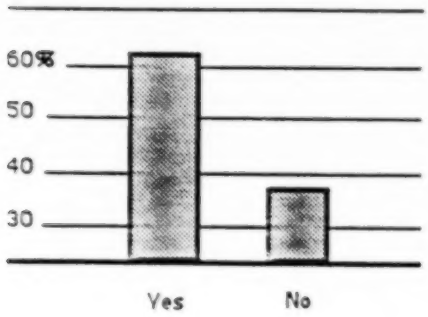

Table Two: Have you ever discussed AIDS in your class?

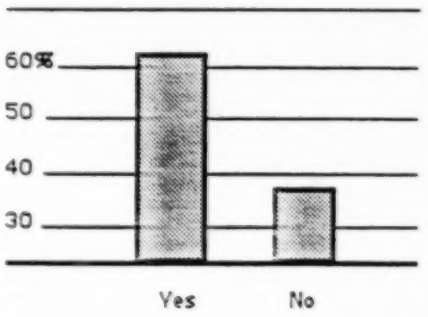

Table 3: Using Gay and Lesbian Authors Related to Teaching About AIDS

Have you ever discussed AIDS in your class?	Have you ever used a book by a gay or lesbian author in your class? Yes	Have you ever used a book by a gay or lesbian author in your class? No
Yes	61%	55%
No	39%	45%

Appendix One

Two Poems By Elizabeth Bishop

The Moose

For Grace Blumer Bowers

From narrow provinces
of fish and bread and tea,
home of the long tides
where the bay leaves the sea
twice a day and takes
the herrings long rides,

where if the river
enters or retreats
in a wall of brown foam
depends on if it meets
the bay coming in,
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,
sometimes the sun sets
facing a red sea,
and others, veins the flats'
lavender, rich mud
in burning rivulets;

on red, gravelly roads,
down rows of sugar maples,
past clapboard farmhouses
and neat, clapboard churches,
bleached, ridged as clamshells,
past twin silver birches,

through late afternoon
a bus journeys west,
the windshield flashing pink,
pink glancing off metal,
brushing the dented flank
of blue, beat-up enamel;

down hollows, up rises,
and waits, patient, while
a lone traveler gives
kisses and embraces
to seven relatives
and a collie supervises.

Goodbye to the elms,
to the farm, to the dog.
The bus starts. The light
grows richer; the fog,
shifting, salty, thin,

comes closing in.

Its cold, round crystals
form and slide and settle
in the white hens' feathers,
in gray glazed cabbages,
on cabbage roses
and lupins like apostles;

the sweet peas clinging
to their wet white string
on the whitewashed fences;
bumblebees creep
inside the foxgloves,
and evening commences.

One stop at Bass River.
Then the Economies --
Lower, Middle, Upper;
Five Islands, Five Houses,
where a woman shakes
a tablecloth out after supper.

A pale flickering. Gone.
The Tantramar marshes
and the smell of salt hay.
An iron bridge trembles
and a loose plank rattles
but doesn't give way.

On the left, a red light
swims through the dark:
a ship's port lantern.
Two rubber boots show,
illuminated, solemn.
A dog gives one bark.

A woman climbs in
with two market bags,
brisk, freckled, elderly.
"A grand night. Yes, sir,
all the way to Boston."
She regards us amicably.

Moonlight as we enter
the New Brunswick woods,
hairy, scratchy, splintery;
moonlight and mist
caught in them like lamb's wool
on bushes in a pasture.

The passengers lie back.
Snore. Some long sighs.
A dreamy divagation
begins in the night,
a gentle, auditory,

slow hallucination...

In the creaking and noises,
an old conversation
-- not concerning us,
but recognizable,
somewhere, back in the bus:
Grandparents' voices

uninterruptedly
talking, in Eternity:
names being mentioned,
things cleared up finally;
what he said, what she said,
who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sickness;
the year he remarried;
the year (something) happened.
She died in childbirth.
That was the son lost
when the schooner foundered.

He took to drink. Yes.
She went to the bad.
When Amos began to pray
even in the store and
finally the family had
to put him away.

"Yes..." that peculiar
affirmative. "Yes..."
A sharp, indrawn breath,
half groan, half acceptance,
that means "Life's like that.
We know it (also death)."

Talking the way they talked
in the old featherbed,
peacefully, on and on,
dim lamplight in the hall,
down in the kitchen, the dog
tucked in her shawl.

Now, it's all right now
even to fall asleep
just as on all those nights.
-- Suddenly the bus driver
stops with a jolt,
turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of
the impenetrable wood
and stands there, looms, rather,
in the middle of the road.
It approaches; it sniffs at

the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,
high as a church,
homely as a house
(or, safe as a house).
A man's voice assures us
"Perfectly harmless..."

Some of the passengers
exclaim in whispers,
childishly, softly,
"Sure are big creatures."
"It's awful plain."
"Look! It's a she!"

Taking her time,
she looks the bus over,
grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel
(We all feel) this sweet
sensation of Joy?

"Curious creatures,"
says our quiet driver,
rolling his r's.
"Look at that, would you."
Then he shifts gears.
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,
the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there's a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

Filling Station

Oh, but it is dirty!
-- this little filling station,
oil-soaked, oil-permeated
to a disturbing, over-all
black translucency.
Be careful with that match!

Father wears a dirty,
oil-soaked monkey suit
that cuts him under the arms,
and several quick and saucy
and greasy sons assist him
(it's a family filling station),
all quite thoroughly dirty.

Do they live in the station?
It has a cement porch
behind the pumps, and on it
a set of crushed and grease-
impregnated wickerwork;
on the wicker sofa
a dirty dog, quite comfy.

Some comic books provide
the only note of color --
of certain color. They lie
upon a big dim doily
draping a taboret
(part of the set), beside
a big hirsute begonia.

Why the extraneous plant?
Why the taboret?
Why, oh why, the doily?
(Embroidered in daisy stitch
with marguerites, I think,
and heavy with gray crochet.)

Somebody embroidered the doily.
Somebody waters the plant,
or oils it, maybe. Somebody
arranges the rows of cans
so that they softly say:
ESSO -- SO -- SO --SO
to high-strung automobiles.
Somebody loves us all.

Appendix Two

Survey Results

Literature Conference Survey on Gay and Lesbian Issues

Please circle and fill in the appropriate responses:

1. Have you ever used a book by a gay or lesbian author in your class?

(1) Yes = 62% (2) No = 38%

If yes, who was the author? Most mentioned = Baldwin, Wilde, Sappho, Whitman, Gunn.

2. Have you ever had an admitted gay or lesbian student in a class you taught.

(1) Yes = 72% (2) No = 28%

3. Have you ever discussed the question of sexual orientation in any of your classes?

(1) Yes = 66% (2) No = 34%

4. Is there a gay and lesbian student organization on your campus?

(1) Yes = 14% (2) No = 86%

5. Have you ever discussed AIDS in your class?

(1) Yes = 62% (2) No = 38%

6. How would you rate your knowledge of the following:

a. Gay and Lesbian Student Life at your school: (1) H = 7% (2) M = 31% (3) L = 62%

b. Gay and Lesbian Literature: (1) H = 14% (2) M = 17% (3) L = 69%

c. AIDS: (1) H = 48% (2) M = 45% (3) L = 7%

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